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ABSTRACT

Recent changes in the family structure and in the work setting are forcing many families to reexamine and redefine the family-career relationship. Until recently, most research on career and family patterns has focused on traditional sex roles. Although competition between career and family roles has caused pain in many families, recent research addressing the nontraditional roles of men and women indicates that most women do derive a sense of personal accomplishment from work and that most fathers who are more actively involved in parenting report that they have a better relationship with their children because of this involvement. Persons in dual-career families need to recognize that planning for career roles and planning for family roles are closely related tasks. Career development programs are needed to help individuals develop career and family goals that are personally satisfying and mutually supportive of other family members. Such programs should focus on increasing awareness of current and future trends affecting the family-career connection, identifying and coping with family and career development stages that carry heavy role demands, addressing barriers to implementing family and career plans, and explaining the personal benefits of combining family and career. (MN)

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OVERVIEW

ERIC® DIGEST NO. 52

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

THE FAMILY-CAREER CONNECTION

Family and career roles are interrelated. Traditional sex roles have influenced the nature of the family-career relationship. However, recent changes in the family structure and in the work setting are creating pressures that require families to redefine this relationship. This transition is still in progress and is creating pressure on all family members.

Career development specialists in educational, community, private practice, and business-industry settings need to understand the basic concepts of family and career and to become more effective in helping people integrate family and career roles in ways that are satisfying both to themselves and to other family members.

Women's Career Development

Traditional sex roles have been reflected in research. It is only recently that research has addressed the nontraditional roles of men and women. First, women in their career roles will be examined.

How Important Is Career For Women?

Miller (1984) cites a study finding that 87 percent of the women surveyed derived a sense of personal accomplishment from work, and 58 percent indicated that they prefer work outside the home to homemaking. Other research suggests that most women will be employed outside the home at some time in their adult lives and that work will have great importance in their lives.

What Are the Career Development Patterns of Women?

The career development patterns of women are varied and have traditionally been influenced by the demands of the family. However, there is a trend toward more consistent, long-term participation by women in the labor force. Several writers have developed schemes to describe women's career patterns. Harmon (1967) suggests five patterns: (1) no work experience, (2) work only until marriage and/or birth of children, (3) combine work with marriage and/or children, (4) reenter the labor force when children are older, and (5) remain single and pursue career.

What Influences Women's Career Decisions?

Key career decisions include whether to have a career, which occupational field to enter, and when to work. Variables that help predict men's career decisions (interests, aptitudes, and career maturity) are less useful for predicting women's career decisions. If this is true, what factors intervene to modify this process? One factor is occupational stereotyping or normative views of whether occupations are appropriate for men or women. The tendency for women's career decisions to be influenced by others is another factor. Barnett (1971) found three groups of women: (1) the internalizers who set their own career goals, (2) the identifiers who set goals based on the influence of significant others, and (3) the compliers who had no career goals and selected options at the last minute.

Career role models also influence women's career decisions. Several writers have found that daughters of working mothers have a higher career orientation than daughters of homemakers. However, this finding is tempered by the mother's satisfaction with her work role. Within some occupational fields and areas of study, there have been few female role models. This fact has supported the high distribution of women in traditionally female occupations.

What Are the Characteristics of Women with High Career Orientation?

A summary of factors associated with high career commitment gives clues about other factors that affect women's career decisions. These include positive self-concepts and higher self-esteem; male-associated characteristics such as self-directedness, assertiveness, and independence as well as female-associated characteristics; access to role models who set high educational and occupational aspirations; willingness to modify family roles to accommodate careers; higher educational levels; and achievement needs that are higher than affiliation needs.

Men's Role in Parenting and Homemaking in Their Families

Research on men in family roles has also been neglected until recently. As women are placing increased emphasis on work roles, men's family roles are being influenced.

Do Men Participate in Family Roles?

Miller (1984) describes research indicating that men spend little time participating in household and child-rearing activities. Time spent on child-rearing tasks by men average from 1.7 to 2.8 hours per week. Fathers do spend more time playing with their children, an average of 9 hours per week. Men spend an average of 11.2 hours per week on household tasks as compared to 53.2 hours for wives who work outside the home. Some research is indicating a shift toward greater balance in time allocation for dual-earner couples.

Are Men Psychologically Involved with Family?

Fathers report being highly psychologically involved with their families. They report that they more often think about family than about work and that the most important things that have happened to them relate to family. Also, when asked whether family or work provided more satisfaction, less than 5 percent indicated work, about 50 percent said they receive equal satisfaction from work and family, and about 45 percent see family as more satisfying than work.

Are Men Competent Parents?

Recent research has focused on men's parenting behaviors using observational techniques. Fathers have been found to be competent and responsive caretakers, both in terms of their use of certain caretaking behaviors and responsiveness to

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infant cues. Observations with infants show fathers to be active and competent caretakers. Children show strong attachment to both father and mother as compared to strangers. They tend to seek fathers for play activities and mothers when they are fatigued, alarmed, or stressed.

How Does Parenting Benefit Fathers?

Fathers who are more actively involved in parenting report that they have more open communication with their children, know their children better, and enjoy being with their children. Some fathers report more conflicts with their children but feel that this is healthy and results in a more realistic view of their children.

The Needs of Children

Several writers speak to the needs of children. Etzioni (1983) suggests that whereas basic parenting does not require a mother at home, it does require that one or both parents be involved in active parenthood with enough time, energy, and commitment for effective parenting.

Research on the effects of parents' working has focused on maternal employment. Some contend that this represents a bias, in that there is no evidence suggesting that mothers' or fathers' employment has only good or only bad effects on all children in all circumstances. Some studies suggest that maternal employment has a more negative effect on sons than on daughters. Other research shows benefits of maternal employment. There is a need for future research to focus on family rather than maternal employment patterns and to expand the effects on children to include social, emotional, and behavioral as well as cognitive and achievement effects. In addition to studying what is, researchers need to imagine what could be. Social changes are occurring to accommodate the needs of families in the family-career connection. These changes are being initiated by community members, employers, and public policymakers.

New Directions for Career Development Programs

People need to recognize that planning for career roles and planning for family roles are closely related tasks. Many have felt the pain of competition between career and family roles, but few have had assistance in clarifying the conflicts and developing career and family goals that are personally satisfying and mutually supportive to other family members. The following goals can provide a framework to enhance career development programs. Programs can help youth and adults:

Increase awareness of current and future trends that affect the family-career connection. These trends are found in various fields such as labor market statistics, policy information, and family and career development research. Materials and strategies that integrate these trends are needed. However, information is not enough. Imaging techniques can be used to personalize the meaning of these trends for individual life plans.

Identify and cope with family and career development stages that carry heavy role demands. When family and career development are discussed concurrently, individuals can recognize that some stages carry heavier role demands than others. Many strategies are available to moderate role demands. Career development programs need to allow participants the freedom to select the strategies that are most congruent with their goals and values. These strategies include timing, accommodation, reduction in family size, and negotiation. Timing strategies include such decisions as when and whether to marry, start a family, or enter into a career. Accommodation includes redefinition of standards of performance for career and family, thus freeing energy and time to deal with both roles. Reduction of size of family decreases family demands and the length of time spent in high-demand family development stages. Finally, negotiation involves being open within families to reassigning roles among family members.

Identify and deal with barriers to implementing their family-career plans. Barriers to implementing new family-career goals include those within the individual, within the family, within the employment situation, and within the community and broader society. First, these barriers need to be identified. When they are within the individual or the family, a variety of counseling experiences can be helpful in reducing both individual conflicts and in increasing understanding and cooperation within the family. Barriers within the employment situation and community can be reduced through such strategies as carefully evaluating employment situations in light of both career and family variables and using advocacy measures to increase employer and community awareness of benefits and services needed to support the family-career connection.

Increase understanding of the personal benefits of combining family and career. Those men and women who are combining career and family in nontraditional ways are reporting benefits to self and family. Helping people understand these benefits can increase motivation for reevaluation and change. Career-oriented women seem to combine male-associated characteristics such as self-directedness, assertiveness, independence, and self-sufficiency with more traditional feminine characteristics. Men who assume primary responsibility for child care tend to behave more like fathers in their interactions with their children but more like mothers in their willingness to assume primary responsibility. They also report better understanding of and communication with their children. Such testimony from parents suggesting positive benefits can help women and men develop belief in new options.

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This ERIC Digest is based on the following publication:

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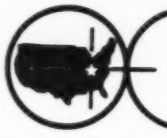

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